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RUEHAK/AMEMBASSY ANKARA 1904
RUEHBJ/AMEMBASSY BEIJING 1876
RUEHIL/AMEMBASSY ISLAMABAD 1930
RUEHBUL/AMEMBASSY KABUL 1892
RUEHNE/AMEMBASSY NEW DELHI 1921
RUEKJCS/SECDEF WASHDC
RUEHNO/USMISSION USNATO 1770
RUEHVEN/USMISSION USOSCE 1857
RUCNDT/USMISSION USUN NEW YORK 1385
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SUBJECT: TAJIKISTAN'S WATER PROBLEMS HAVE A DIRECT EFFECT ON HEALTH AND THE ECONOMY

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¶1. SUMMARY: Nowhere is the theme of this year's United Nations' Human Development Report entitled "Beyond Scarcity: Power, Poverty and the Global Water Crisis" more fitting than in Tajikistan. Despite an abundance of water in Tajikistan's many rivers and enormous hydroelectric potential, Tajikistan still suffers from serious health problems and economic under-development because it has been unable to properly utilize and manage its water resources. USAID's Water User's Association program successfully empowered farmers on a micro level to effectively manage water resources and with the implementation of a new Water Users Association law now in place, this model can be replicated throughout Tajikistan. END SUMMARY.

¶2. Tajikistan ranks 122 out of 177 countries on the UN's Human Development Index. According to the United Nations, only 59 percent of the Tajik population has access to a centralized water supply. Of the 699 centralized water systems in Tajikistan, 113 are broken and 358 do not provide sanitary water. Only 23 percent of the urban population has access to a sewer system, and only five percent in rural areas. Since the fall of the Soviet Union, Tajikistan's infrastructure has crumbled. Current public spending on managing water resources amounts to only six to seven percent of public spending in 1990.

The lack of a water supply and sanitation system directly contributes to Tajikistan's health problems; for example, UNICEF's office in Tajikistan directly links a major cause of infant death-diarrhea--to unsanitary water conditions. Poor water management also has an economic impact. Sultan Rahimov, Acting Chair of the Aral Sea Rescue Foundation, estimates that Tajikistan loses out on \$1.7 billion each year in mismanagement of water resources, ineffective consumption, and a lack of effective cooperation with its regional neighbors.

¶3. On November 30 the government approved a \$997 million Ministry of Land Reclamation and Water proposal to rehabilitate water and sanitation systems between 2007 to 2020 and provide clean drinking water to the country. The proposal outlines that 15 percent would be funded by the government, 10 percent from

local budgets, five percent from private industry and anticipates that 70 percent of the \$997 million from investors, primarily meaning international organizations. The ministry anticipates the government will formally accept the proposal soon. (COMMENT: It is unclear what the status of this project will be given the recent appointment of a new Minister of Water. END COMMENT.)

USAID WATER USERS ASSOCIATION: AN EXAMPLE OF GOOD MANAGEMENT

¶4. USAID's successful Water Users Association (WUA) project has been an effective example of how local communities can take control of their local water resources. WUA programs are instrumental in assisting farmers to rehabilitate their drinking water and irrigation supply system. The WUA program's reach extends beyond mere technical assistance and creates truly sustainable community groups responsible for managing their own water resources and utilities-everything from establishing prices to applying for infrastructure rehabilitation loans. Through the WUA program, farmers learn tangible and transferable skills to manage their future. WUA taught farmers how to operate computers and created work spaces for local associations to meet. WUA members are trained in financial management and conflict management. The program is a mechanism that teaches transparent and democratic ways to solve a problem.

¶5. In addition to implementing the WUA program, USAID's partner, Winrock International, also provided legislative advice to the government and successfully lobbied for Tajikistan's first Water Users Association Law, passed this month. When the law is formally enacted, it will provide a legal operational environment for WUAs. Before the WUA law, farmers did not have the official right to organize or collect money from water users to pay water utility bills. (NOTE: Most people in Tajikistan do not pay their water utility fees, simply ignoring the nominal fee. END NOTE.) This law provides a legal framework that delegates control to WUAs to solve problems, rather than solely relying on sometimes ineffective local Ministry of Land

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Reclamation and Water chapters. It also gives power to the WUAs to organize equitable water usage. The law defines democratically principled parameters under which the WUAs should operate.

¶6. COMMENT: Providing economic development assistance and laying the groundwork for good healthcare in Tajikistan are goals for the U.S. mission in Tajikistan. Water problems affect a range of sectors, from agriculture to construction to food processing. Rehabilitating failed water infrastructure and assisting the government on water management remain areas where the U.S. government can become engaged. Despite the program's success, the program faces budget cuts next year. We will monitor the existing WUAs and implementation of the new WUA law to see whether the advances achieved to date hold firm. The WUA's methodology of incorporating local governance improvements into development work should prove valuable in other sectors besides infrastructure. END COMMENT.

JACOBSON